The First Nations National Child Benefit

Progress report for the year ending | **march 31, 2001**

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Affaires indiennes et du Nord Canada

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Purpose of the Progress Report

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) produces an annual report on the progress of First Nation community reinvestments under the National Child Benefit (NCB) program.

During fiscal year 2000-2001, two complementary evaluation initiatives were undertaken by INAC and First Nations' representatives.

- An interim evaluation of the overall First Nations NCB program, focussed on identifying practical measures to improve the program.

- A self-evaluation by representatives of First Nations assisted communities in their own reviews of NCB projects, with a specific goal of promoting the effective use of investment resources and clarifying the purpose of the interim evaluation of the entire First Nations National Child Benefit program.

The information obtained through both evaluation processes enables the Department and First Nations to measure the impacts of NCB initiatives at both the local and national levels, and establishes a basis for making informed decisions regarding the use of future resources.

To provide the context for the interim evaluation and the self-evaluation, this report also outlines the background and objectives of the program and describes activities of the First Nations and INAC in support of the efforts of communities, organizations and individuals to reduce and prevent child poverty and to assist parents to participate in the labour force.

As a country, we must be direct about the magnitude of the challenge and ambitious in our commitment to tackle the most pressing problems facing Aboriginal people. Reaching our objectives will take time, but we must not be deterred by the length of the journey or the obstacles that we may encounter along the way.

Speech from the Throne —
January 2001

The National Child Benefit

The National Child Benefit was implemented in 1998 after the first ministers agreed that the federal, provincial and territorial governments should work together to address the issue of child poverty, facilitate linkages to the labour market and harmonize services for children and families where possible. The specific objectives set for the National Child Benefit were to help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty; promote attachment to the work force; and reduce overlap and duplication between Canadian and provincial/territorial programs.

Since 1998, the Government of Canada has contributed significant funding to the enrichment of the Canada Child Tax Credit and the NCB Supplement as part of the National Child Benefit. The increased federal investments enable provinces, territories and First Nation communities to realize savings without having to reduce the amount of direct income benefit to families with dependent children.

The National Child Benefit initiative supports two broad social interventions.

Reinvestment Component

Provincial and territorial governments are able to adjust (reduce) their social assistance benefit schedules accordingly, yielding savings that are reinvested in increased services and benefits for children of low-income families.

National Child Benefit Supplement

The federal government increases benefits for low-income families through the NCB Supplement. These funds are delivered directly to low-income families with children, thus ensuring families are assisted through the transition from social assistance to paid work.

The First Nations National Child Benefit

It is the policy of the Government of Canada that children living on reserves should receive benefits which are reasonably comparable to those received by other Canadian children from national social service programs. To this end, the National Child Benefit Supplement has been extended on reserves, and First Nations have been able to provide services comparable to those provided by provinces/territories to non-Indian persons. The First Nations program shares the same objectives, namely to:

- help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty;
- promote attachment to the labour market by ensuring families will always be better off as a result of working; and
- reduce overlap and duplication by harmonizing program objectives and benefits, and simplifying administration.

The First Nations program aims at ensuring that children receive the best possible opportunity to develop fully their potential as healthy, active, contributing members of their communities. The program combines new federal investments with provincial, territorial and First Nations re-allocations of resources. This enables First Nations to adjust social assistance for recipients with children by an amount equal to the federal increase (thus ensuring that no one receives less money than previously), and permits First Nations to reinvest the savings in community-based programs for low-income families.

Reinvestment Component

First Nation governments may reinvest savings from adjustments made through social assistance in programs and services tailored to meet their own needs and priorities. Activities under the reinvestment program may include such initiatives as support for child/day care, child nutrition programs, early child development programs, employment and skills development, cultural awareness or traditional teachings, recreational activities and income supplements for low-income families.

The National Child Benefit reinvestment component provides a sense of community ownership of the programs developed under the NCB initiative, because the programs are designed by First Nations themselves to address the diverse and unique needs of the people in their communities. The reinvestment component affords scope and flexibility for First Nations to plan, design and implement innovative community-based programs that are culturally relevant and respond to the specific and unique needs of the community, while meeting the overall purpose of the NCB by lessening child poverty.

National Child Benefit Supplement

The federal government increases benefits for low-income families through the NCB Supplement; these funds are delivered directly to low-income families with children, thus ensuring families are assisted through the transition from social assistance to paid work.

In some cases, provincial/territorial governments may choose to make additional investments in benefits for children of low-income families. When a province or territory supplements the federal contributions with additional funding, INAC will similarly increase on reserve resources, at levels comparable to the provincial/territorial investments.

Because it is distinct from the provincial/territorial program, a separate evaluation framework was developed for the First Nations National Child Benefit program. The framework is discussed below.

First Nations National Child Benefit Program Funding

INAC provides funding to communities for income support payments to low-income families residing on reserves and in Yukon, and for other reinvestment initiatives in accordance with National Child Benefit objectives. The reinvestment funds are calculated on a regional basis, in accordance with the amounts and processes by which provincial and territorial governments adjust their social assistance rates as a consequence of the National Child Benefit Supplement and the increased Canada Child Tax Benefit.

Since the initiative was created, Human Resources Development Canada has spent approximately $2.5 billion on the National Child Benefit Supplement. For 2000-2001, $54.3 million was expended by First Nations on National Child Benefit reinvestment projects.

First Nations National Child Benefit Program Reporting

Federal and provincial governments have agreed to report on both outputs and outcomes of federal investments, provincial/territorial reinvestments and First Nation reinvestments, and to measure these against NCB objectives. Accordingly, First Nation recipients are required to report to INAC on activities and results related to projects generated by their incremental NCB funding. Specific program implementation information is required, as well as indicators of program effectiveness, such as earned income levels of low-income families, the percentage of total income of low-income families that results from employment, the number of families with children receiving social assistance and other evidence of impacts on child poverty levels.

The annual reports submitted by First Nation governments list the titles of projects and briefly outlines the purpose, activities, schedule and resources expended on each project carried out during the year. Short descriptions of project outcomes and accomplishments for the year, including the number of clients assisted are also required.

Regional offices compile the First Nations reports and submit to Headquarters by July 15 of each year a summary report of activities during the previous fiscal year.

Program monitoring is continuous to obtain current information concerning program activities, outputs and outcomes. Feedback to the regions and First Nations on the results of the ongoing monitoring is an important aspect of the process.

INAC is required to provide input to the annual federal/provincial/territorial report on the NCB that is presented to first ministers. In addition, INAC produces its own annual progress report, which is distributed to all First Nations and regional offices. The report provides information to the public, the regions and First Nations on the progress of the First Nation community reinvestment component of the NCB initiative.

Impacts of the First Nation National Child Benefit Program

Beneficiaries

The number of families and children benefiting from the First Nations National Child Benefit social service initiatives, nationally and by region, during fiscal year 2000-2001, are identified in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - First Nations National Child Benefit Program: Beneficiaries in 2000-2001

Region	Number of Families	Number of Children
Atlantic	593	963
Quebec	14,214	20,433
Ontario	2,998	6,101
Manitoba	6,197	14,796
Saskatchewan	1,294	3,599
Alberta	3,396	8,354
British Columbia	17,046	28,907
Yukon	165	253
National Totals	**45,903**	**83,406**

Reinvestment Component

The National Child Benefit is a common undertaking of the federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments designed to combat child poverty in Canada. The shared effort involves simultaneous actions by all levels of government to ensure beneficial impacts from the considerable resources invested in the initiative. At the community level, the reinvestment component enables new local programming and supports the development of a sense of community ownership for the programs designed by First Nations to meet their identified needs and priorities.

The increase in federal government commitments through the NCB allows for the redirection of funds, which would otherwise be used for social assistance. These funds become the reinvestment portion of the NCB for First Nation communities. In many instances, the reinvestment funds enable communities to create needed programs that would otherwise not exist, such as breakfast programs for children, child-related services for working parents that make it possible for them to remain employed, or cultural and traditional programs. Reinvestment allocations, which may not be large for a community, can be used to complement funding available to First Nations from other sources, such as social assistance funds transferrable under the INAC/First Nations Work Opportunity Program or investment funds from the federal Aboriginal Head Start or First Nations and Inuit Child Care programs.

The scope and flexibility of the system established under the First Nations National Child Benefit allow First Nation communities to establish culturally relevant projects that respond to the distinct needs of their people, according to their own priorities, and in a manner, time and place of their choosing. Accordingly, projects funded under the reinvestment component contribute to the growth and betterment of communities in the following ways.

- Services are made available to low-income families and children, which can improve their current and future conditions of life, by promoting their greater participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the community.
- The assessment, planning, design and administrative activities related to projects help the community develop local managerial expertise, which can have broader usefulness to the community.
- The program reinforces the thrust of the Government of Canada to develop self-governing, self-determining and self-reliant First Nation communities.

Table 2 sets out the total reinvestment allocations for 2000-2001, nationally and by region.

TABLE 2 - Actual NCB Reinvestments for 2000-2001

Region	NCB Reinvestments ($)
Atlantic	3,000,000
Quebec	8,539,500
Ontario	5,217,500
Manitoba	7,785,570
Saskatchewan	11,440,807
Alberta	9,667,236
British Columbia	4,324,000
Yukon	264,100
Additional Reinvestment Envelope	3,800,250
National Total	**54,038,963**

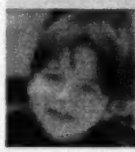


Table 3 sets out the estimated total reinvestment allocations for 2001-2002, nationally and by region.

TABLE 3 – Estimated NCB Reinvestments for 2001-2002

Region	NCB Reinvestments ($)
Atlantic	3,000,000
Quebec	8,539,500
Ontario	7,279,700
Manitoba	6,000,000
Saskatchewan	15,443,872
Alberta	13,091,252
British Columbia	5,454,000
Yukon	732,700
National Total	**59,541,024**

Reinvestment Programs

The offsets to social assistance budgets are being used by First Nations to develop a wide range of programs and services for low-income families and their children. The various types of reinvestment programs are clustered under the following five broad categories.

Child/Day Care Programs: Programs directed toward the enhancement of day-care facilities and the complementarity of activities related to child-care services that allow more families with low incomes to gain access to day-care spaces, or to have their share of child-care costs reduced. These include:

- enhancements to existing day-care centres; and
- increasing day-care spaces.

Child Nutrition Programs: Programs directed at improving health and well-being for children by providing school-feeding programs as well as education to parents on family nutrition and meal preparation. These include:

- educational programs on nutrition;
- food hampers delivered to homes; and
- meals (hot lunch, breakfast, snack) served at school.

Early Childhood Development Programs: Programs directed at early intervention for parents to help their children get a healthy start in life. These include:

- parenting skills programs; and
- drop-in centres for parents.

Employment Opportunities/Training Programs: Programs directed at increasing the skill level of individuals and thereby increasing their chances of obtaining work. These include:

- complementary investments in employment and training programs; and
- summer work programs for youth.

Community Enrichment Initiatives: First Nation communities have invested in many programs that do not fit into the above categories but meet NCB objectives. They include programs such as:

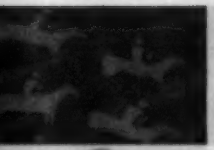
- teaching traditional culture (e.g., art, music, storytelling);
- support programs for youth;
- recreational activities, celebrations, peer support groups and other group activities that bring together community elders and children and youth; and
- family and community supports, such as life skills, financial management and clothing exchanges.

Table 4 sets out the reported expenditures by reinvestment activity area for 2000-2001[1].

TABLE 4 – Actual Reported NCB Reinvestment Initiatives by Activity Area for 2000-2001

Activity Area	Actual Expenditures ($)
Child/Day Care	617,000
Child Nutrition	5,002,700
Early Childhood Development	3,463,200
Employment Opportunities/Training	5,078,500
Community Enrichment	8,821,500
National Total	**22,982,900**

[1] In the case of First Nations under multi-year agreements, we are not able to provide program results and expenditures due to the specific conditions of this type of agreement. The NCB monies are included in their core budget for which they already have management flexibility.



Tables 4A to 4E sets out the expenditures reported by region and nationally for each reinvestment activity area for 2000-2001.

TABLE 4A – Child Care: National and Regional Reported Expenditures for 2000-2001

Region	Actual Expenditures ($)
Atlantic	5,700
Quebec	87,200
Ontario	0
Manitoba	140,500
Saskatchewan	67,800
Alberta	155,800
British Columbia	140,000
Yukon	20,000
National Total	**617,000**

TABLE 4B – Child Nutrition: National and Regional Reported Expenditures for 2000-2001

Region	Actual Expenditures ($)
Atlantic	9,300
Quebec	1,042,000
Ontario	442,500
Manitoba	1,605,400
Saskatchewan	47,400
Alberta	1,363,000
British Columbia	440,600
Yukon	52,500
National Total	**5,002,700**

TABLE 4C – Early Childhood Development: National and Regional Reported Expenditures for 2000-2001

Region	Actual Expenditures ($)
Atlantic	0
Quebec	878,300
Ontario	199,700
Manitoba	223,300
Saskatchewan	43,600
Alberta	188,000
British Columbia	1,917,800
Yukon	12,500
National Total	**3,463,200**

TABLE 4D – Employment Opportunities/Training: National and Regional Reported Expenditures for 2000-2001

Region	Actual Expenditures ($)
Atlantic	24,800
Quebec	1,001,000
Ontario	131,300
Manitoba	1,705,200
Saskatchewan	443,800
Alberta	1,461,300
British Columbia	311,100
Yukon	0
National Total	**5,078,500**

TABLE 4E – Community Enrichment: National and Regional Reported Expenditures for 2000-2001

Region	Actual Expenditures ($)
Atlantic	788,300
Quebec	1,174,500
Ontario	302,900
Manitoba	2,391,200
Saskatchewan	859,500
Alberta	2,312,600
British Columbia	915,000
Yukon	77,500
National Total	**8,821,500**

Impact of the National Child Benefit Projects on First Nation Communities

First Nations have carried out projects in all reinvestment activity areas during the past year. In some instances reinvestment funds have been complementary to financial resources available from other programs (e.g., Work Opportunity Program, Aboriginal Head Start, First Nations and Inuit Child Care Program) to create a project of a scale and content not possible solely with reinvestment funding. Following are some examples of projects organized and implemented by community groups using NCB reinvestment funds.

Fort McKay First Nation Wellness Program

The Fort McKay Wellness Team was the result of a local project to integrate the community child-centred and youth-centred programs with the recreation and culture programs. Regularly scheduled meetings were held at which young mothers were taught such basic home-management skills as budgeting, shopping, and food preparation and storage. Nutritious meals were provided to children and youth at the meetings. An emphasis was also placed on the development of social skills through interaction with other people in the community.

The Wellness Team, which developed from this project, comprises the co-ordinators of various community programs, elders, a nutritionist and dietitian, and representatives of the local school. The integrated approach to wellness needs, services and issues made possible by the initiative has enabled various community elements to work together effectively in attempting to resolve common wellness problems.

Marten Falls First Nation Community/Youth Projects

Marten Falls First Nation undertook a number of initiatives to encourage parents and children to participate together in community activities, to promote cultural awareness and to strengthen unity in the community. Reinvestment funds were used to obtain community facilities and equipment for which money had not been available previously.

The projects carried out by Marten Falls First Nation included the following.

- **Summer Students Program:** A summer employment program for students who planned to return to school in the fall. The earnings enabled students to purchase goods such as clothing and school supplies.

- **Summer Camps:** Support for youths aged 9 to 12 years to attend a camp located outside the community. These children participate in various camp activities, and have opportunities to meet youth from different communities.

- **Improved Students:** Students who demonstrate significant improvement in school are rewarded to encourage school attendance.

- **Regalia Program:** A workshop was conducted to teach youth to make costumes needed to dance in the powwow. Fourteen youth and five adults attended the workshop for 10 days and subsequently participated in the powwow.

- **Drop-In Centre:** A space was set up in the community hall to give youth a place to meet and associate with their friends.

- **Sporting Equipment:** Equipment was purchased for the use of youth in after-school activities.

- **Aboriginal Day:** A community day was organized to give the entire community an opportunity to enjoy group activities together.

- **Powwow:** The program was organized so young people could learn about their culture. Participants attended sessions on traditional activities, such as dancing and the sweat lodge.

- **Skating Program:** Skates were purchased for children of families with limited resources so they could participate with their parents in a winter activity.

- **Beach Development and Swim Program:** A beach was constructed to provide a safe swimming environment. Lifeguards were hired and swim classes were conducted.

Little Red River Cree Nation Integrated Program

The Little Red River Cree Nation has taken an integrated approach to the NCB strategy by creating projects aimed at community enhancement. These include skill development for parents by promoting positive parent child relationships, promoting healthy childhood growth and development through nutrition programs, parents working with a social development liaison officer to ensure overall family and community wellness, and recreation to increase self-esteem in youths. Much of the success has been attributed to the voluntary nature of the projects and to the fact that parents can decide on the level and length of participation.

Funding was used for the following projects:

- recreation co-ordinators;
- a healing cultural camp;
- summer student employment;
- the Head Start Program (e.g. hot lunches);
- human relations development;
- a social development liaison officer;
- community spirit support; and
- the participation of local youth in provincial sporting events.

Listuguj Activity Youth Centre

The Listuguj Activity Youth Centre provides local youth with a safe and comfortable place to gather, socialize and rediscover their Mi'gmaq culture. The Chief and Council of Listuguj have donated the old community hall building for use as a youth centre. The centre is open seven days a week, from eight to ten hours a day, for youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years. A range of programs and services offer participants a wide choice of recreational, social and cultural activities. Current activities of the centre include:

- craft making;
- kick-boxing;
- seasonal activities, such as pumpkin carving;
- board games;
- special outings to visit Native traditionalists;
- March break activities;
- sleep-overs;
- workshops on substance abuse, youth and sexuality, fetal alcohol syndrome and the residential school impact; and
- seminars and workshops in the community pertaining to youth.

A youth council was formed to help steer the direction of the youth centre, and staff are seeking to expand the mandate of the Council to include a band councillor who will act as liaison between youth and the Listuguj government.

Major renovations began in 2002 to reconstruct the old hall into a new facility; funding for this major project comes from the Listuguj Mi'gmaq government (through commercial fisheries profits) and the Aboriginal Development Fund.

The Youth Centre Project is considered to have had a positive impact on youth and the community in general. Local representatives state that without the funds made available through the First Nations NCB program, Listuguj would be unable to maintain day-to-day operations of this much-needed resource.

Self-Evaluation of the First Nations National Child Benefit Program

The reinvestment program provides a source of funds that First Nations can use to develop innovative programs they consider appropriate to their unique needs. To optimize the usefulness of reinvestment funds, communities need to be able to assess whether the goals established for their individual projects, and the NCB program as a whole, are being met. The essential purpose, then, of the self-evaluation component of the evaluation process is to help First Nations build the capacity to carry out project assessments based on the success criteria they established. The self-evaluation skills developed during the process are also applicable to the monitoring of the progress of other locally administered programs.

Self-evaluations can also be used as an accountability tool within communities, and as an effective mechanism for INAC to gain information that can be used for the ongoing monitoring process, the progress report, the interim and summative evaluations as well as in social policy development.

The process for self-evaluation of reinvestment projects began in 1999 with a guide that was to be produced with input from First Nations. A cycle of ongoing workshops was planned at which the evaluation tools would be examined and a self-evaluation process finalized. First Nations communities from all regions of the country that were using NCB reinvestment funds would be invited to participate in the workshops.

A series of workshops to evaluate the proposed guide was held early in 2000, culminating in a fifth workshop in March, which was attended by representatives from 18 communities in seven regions (only the Atlantic region was not represented). Workshop participants suggested it would be valuable for them to evaluate at least one project in their communities, and to hold a national workshop in the fall to share their experiences and explore ways to improve the process. Accordingly, a follow-up workshop with

those involved in the pilot self-evaluations was held in September 2000 at which time their self-evaluations were discussed and the self-evaluation process and guide were further improved and made more user friendly.

From January to March 2001, workshops were held in all eight regions, attended by representatives from a different group of First Nations. Also present were some participants from the previous workshops who shared their experiences and acted as co-facilitators. Workshop participants generally agreed that the evaluation exercise gave them a better understanding of the reinvestment program, enabled them to make improvements to their local projects and simplified the reporting process. They also believed the workshops should be continued to provide a forum for discussion and information sharing among communities and for input into national-level policy. It was also decided that subsequent workshops would be held regionally, with the training eventually conducted by First Nations facilitators.

Future engagement of First Nations in the self-evaluation process has had limited success for numerous reasons, including an uncertainty about the purpose of the process, the administrative reporting burden experienced by many First Nations and a lack of resources. Nevertheless, participants from some 50 different First Nations representing every region have taken part in the sessions held to date, and their input has resulted in an effective self-evaluation system that is available to all First Nations. Moreover, the project evaluations completed by participants have allowed INAC to understand better how reinvestment resources are used and to see the benefits realized by First Nations from the reinvestment program.